

## CITY OF BALTIMORE

MARTIN O'MALLEY, Mayor



## HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Commissioner  
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### City Health Commissioner Issues Challenge to Area Pediatric Clinicians

Baltimore, MD (June 14, 2006) – Today, Baltimore City's Health Commissioner Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D. is challenging all local pediatric practices serving low-income families to give all young children books at their check-ups, along with parental advice on the importance of reading.

Universal implementation of this program -- called Reach Out and Read -- would make Baltimore the first city in the country to adopt this model for all of its at-risk children. This announcement is being made at an 11:00 a.m. press conference held at the University of Maryland Hospital for Children.

Giving books to children ages 6 months to 5 years of age and literacy advice to parents at each pediatric visit started as a pilot at one clinic in Boston has spread to 2,900 doctor's offices from coast to coast. Nationally, Reach Out and Read doctors and nurses distribute 4.1 million books to more than 2.5 million children and their families annually.

While Reach Out and Read is well-established in Baltimore--31 practices give out 37,000 books to 20,000 children--the program is not yet universally implemented by all pediatric practices serving low-income families. This public health challenge invites 26 practices that do not currently participate in Reach Out and Read to adopt this model. Dr. Sharfstein states that the "goal is to make literacy promotion a standard part of pediatric primary care in our city".

Reach Out and Read has a strong record of research support. Published evidence shows that participating families are far more likely to read to their children and have more children's books in their home. Research also indicates that reading aloud to children is the best predictor of reading success in school. Baltimore City Public School System CEO Bonnie Copeland will attend the press conference to express her support for this effort.

The challenge is also supported by the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. "It is our hope that AAP members will implement Reach Out and Read in their practices leading to a new generation of literacy," says Dr. Lichenstein, who also is head of the division of emergency medicine at the University of Maryland Hospital for Children and an associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

The University of Maryland Hospital for Children's Reach Out and Read program, one of Baltimore's oldest programs, was established under the direction of Dr. Virginia Keane, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of Maryland School of Medicine. "We encourage parents to sit down and read a book to their child so that the child becomes familiar with the sound of written language and the pleasure of a good story," says Dr. Keane. "Reading together is a wonderful bonding experience for both parent and child."

For more information about Reach Out and Read or to learn how to become a medical provider, please visit Reach Out and Read's website at [www.reachoutandread.org](http://www.reachoutandread.org) or email [Growth@reachoutandread.org](mailto:Growth@reachoutandread.org).

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